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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ANKARA 000357

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CENTCOM CDR AND FOREIGN MINISTER DISCUSS IRAQ,  
REGION

Classified By: Ambassador Eric S. Edelman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: GEN Abizaid and Foreign Minister Gul agreed on the goal of a stable, democratic and unified Iraq during their January 11 meeting in Ankara. Gul reiterated Turkey's support of elections in Iraq occurring on time with the fullest possible participation. Turkey is reaching out to Sunni Arabs with limited success; other Arabs could be more effective than Turkey, opined one MFA official, but they are reluctant to advocate democracy since they don't practice it. General Abizaid encouraged Turkey to continue working on the Iraqi Sunni Arabs and reassure them that the US is their natural ally, not their enemy. He praised Turkey's cooperation on Iraq and urged that it expand, including our use of Incirlik Air Base (IAB) for logistic support. Gul acknowledged the importance to Turkey of the coalition's success in Iraq, but did not offer a definitive response to our proposal to use IAB as a logistics hub. Gul expressed the usual Turkish concerns about Kurdish ambitions and possible ethnic conflict in Kirkuk. He also advised against using Peshmerga in Mosul. GEN Abizaid welcomed Turkey's increased contribution to ISAF with its assumption of command in February. Gul said Turkey was again considering leading a PRT; other officials indicated that Ankara was focusing on taking over an existing UK-lead PRT in the north to facilitate the British establishing another in the west or south. They also briefly discussed Saudi Arabia (Gul saw BMENA as a potential counter to growing extremism there), shared concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions, and the Middle East peace process (Gul was optimistic after his recent visit there). End summary.

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Iraq: "Help Us Help You"  
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2. (C) Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul opened his January 11 meeting with the visiting Commander Central Command, General John Abizaid, by noting that after the US, Turkey has lost more citizens in Iraq than any other country. GEN Abizaid corrected Gul, noting that it was Iraq who had lost more citizens than any other country in the fight against insurgents as Iraqis are engaged in a struggle for a new beginning.

3. (C) Gul noted that Turkey wanted a democratic, peaceful Iraq, adding that when Iraqis suffer, Turks suffer ("when there is a fire in the neighborhood, you feel the heat"). "Your success is our success," he emphasized. Turkey saw the January 30 elections as important and hoped that they would not be postponed. At the same time, full participation was also important to ensure the legitimacy of the transitional government. In this regard, Turkey was reaching out to Sunni's to encourage their participation. This included training persons from the Iraq Islamic Party (IIP) in Turkey, added MFA MidEast DDG Safak Gokturk. Gul said he disagreed with the argument that a postponement would improve the security situation, and worried that changing the calendar "could affect other steps." Thus, we needed elections to occur on schedule.

4. (C) GEN Abizaid responded that the US-Turkey relationship was important for our successes in the region, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. We needed to have open communications. Although we disagreed over some things, the two countries had no differences over the objective -- a united Iraq with a government that represented all Iraqis. He expressed condolences for the Turkish policemen who were ambushed in Mosul last month. He agreed with Gul on the need for elections to occur on schedule, projecting that there would be a big turnout in the north and south, and probably smaller turnout in the four Sunni Arab provinces due to the difficult security environment there. Nonetheless, the newly elected leaders will find a way to ensure Sunni Arabs can still participate in the political process. In fact, the US wanted Sunni leaders to come forward, and he urged Turkey to tell its Sunni Iraqi contacts that the US wants them to have a future in Iraq. He asked Gul to reassure them that the US was their natural ally -- we will not allow Iran to dominate Iraq and we will take care of the extremists.

5. (C) Many Sunnis tell the Turks that they understand that they should participate in the process but claim that they would lose their grass roots support if they did so, Gul said. In response, Turkey was arguing that if Sunni parties

feel they cannot participate, they should at least put forward some individuals. Unfortunately, they fear being branded as a US puppet if they participate in the electoral process. Gokturk added that the real key to Sunni outreach was the Arab world, but they have an "allergy" to universal suffrage. He warned that what they say to the US is different from what they say in regional gatherings.

16. (C) Besides elections, building up Iraq's security forces is important to Iraqis to move from an occupation mentality to one of partnership, GEN Abizaid continued. He expected that the new government would be looking to Turkey to help with this. He noted that the police in particular were in need of help. Gul said that Turkey wanted to help with the training of police and was prepared to do so over the long-term in Turkey. In addition, the GOT supported the NATO training mission, although Ankara would like to see "better coordination" within the Alliance.

17. (C) Recalling his opening remarks, GEN Abizaid reiterated his belief that Turkey's cooperation was important to success in Iraq. He appreciated the GOT's permitting materiel to flow across the border, but noted that additional logistics support through Incirlik Air Base (IAB) could reduce crowding at the border and ease the demand for convoys. Gul repeated, "your success is our success" in Iraq. "We know we have to help you." "We will let you know soon," he added, referring to our proposal to establish a logistics hub at IAB. "We also need your help," he added. (Comment: While Gul did not elaborate, we interpret this last comment to refer to the Turkish public's strong opposition to our actions in Iraq. "Help" may mean progress on stabilizing Iraq and some visible steps on the PKK. Nonetheless, both civilian and military officials have suggested to us that progress on the logistics hub may be in the offing. End comment.)

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Iraq: PKK/Kongra Gel  
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18. (C) GEN Abizaid acknowledged that terrorism in Iraq was an important issue for both Turkey and the US. Regarding PKK/Kongra Gel, our intention to rid Iraq of these terrorists was clear, but timing was an issue. The current priority was securing the four predominantly Sunni Arab provinces and defeating AIF, Zarqawi, etc. Nonetheless, CENTCOM was mindful of the PKK threat and would develop planning together with Turkey and Iraq. Gul thanked the general for raising this issue. He said he had not intended to raise it, as the trilateral meeting on the PKK/Kongra Gel that morning (septel) produced a good understanding among the parties. He understood that the time was not "convenient" for military action, although "other things" could be done.

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Iraq: Kurds and Kirkuk  
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19. (C) GEN Abizaid recalled his conversations with Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani. They are realistic and have respect for both Turkey's interests and the process underway in Iraq. Gul asserted that "Kurds are our relatives; we want them to be happy." The GOT had hosted both Barzani and Talabani (separately) in Ankara and had "open and sincere" talks.

110. (C) In that regard, Gul expressed concern about the potential for ethnic conflict in Kirkuk. The Kurdish attempt to postpone elections there was worrisome. He asked that the US be careful and not concede to this demand. He understood that both the US and the UN shared Turkey's concern about the past IDP returns to Kirkuk. This could have a big impact on stability, he asserted. The Kurds were entitled to the full rights of citizenship, yet they are talking about a referendum on independence that could be a "huge problem." They should not be provocative, he concluded.

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Iraq: Words Matter  
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111. (C) Ambassador Edelman raised the inflammatory rhetoric that many Turks used during the operation in Fallujah. Gen Abizaid described what the situation had been in the city before the operation, explained how 90 percent of the population had left before the operation began, and how the people returning to the city now are expressing gratitude to the coalition for ridding their community of terrorists. Gul allowed that some of the statements circulating at the time were just silly, such as the accusation that the US was using "atomic bombs" in Fallujah. Others were the result of extreme sensitivities giving rise to misstatements. "We told them they were wrong," Gul stated.

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Iraq: Concern about Mosul

12. (C) Gul asked about the situation in Mosul. General Abizaid explained how the recently increased numbers of troops in the city has helped calm the situation. Gul warned that if more troops are needed, better they be American than Peshmerga. The US needs as many friends as it can find in Mosul, and an influx of Peshmerga might "cause other problems for you."

Afghanistan: Renewed Interest in PRT in North

13. (C) Gul noted that Turkey would deploy over 1,000 additional troops to Afghanistan as it assumes command of ISAF in February. He announced that Turkey had "changed its mind" on leading a PRT ("in the north," Deputy Undersecretary Uzumcu quickly added), and the Health and Education Ministries were working on ways to "more meaningfully" assist Afghanistan. GEN Abizaid said that he looked forward to Turkey's leadership in ISAF and as NATO expands that mission westward. He admitted to some disappointment that NATO had not worked faster, and hoped the number of PRTs would expand.

(Note: The DCM followed up with Uzumcu the following day. Uzumcu understood that the UK was looking to turn its two existing PRTs over to some other country so it could lead others in the ISAF phase II region. He indicated that Ankara would be working with London to permit Turkey to take over one of the existing PRTs. End note.)

Other Issues: Saudi Arabia/BMENA, Iran, Central Asia

14. (C) Other issues discussed included:

-- Saudi Arabia/BMENA: GEN Abizaid expressed increasing concern for the stability of Saudi Arabia given al Qaida's ideological gains within Saudi society and targeting of the royal family; he encouraged Turkey to join the US in helping the Saudis. Gul agreed with the general's analysis, adding that a closed political process produces the psychological environment conducive to terrorism. Turkey saw the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI) and its encouragement of indigenous reform as an effective countermeasure to the pent-up frustrations that lead people to terrorism. Cultivating young, moderate leaders was more important than police or military action. Gokturk noted a relationship between Saudi stability and developments in Iraq: Wahabis are contemplating what new balances might emerge if Iraq falls apart. GEN Abizaid said he well understood the linkages, noting that most foreign fighters in Iraq are from Syria and Saudi Arabia.

-- Central Asia: Gul thought Central Asia's problems could similarly be traced to a democracy deficit. He agreed with General Abizaid that Turkey served as a good example for both the Middle East and Central Asia.

-- Iran: GEN Abizaid hoped Tehran could be convinced to give up its ambition to acquire nuclear weapons. Gul agreed, adding that Turkey has been conveying that message for years.

-- MEPP: Gul recalled his discussions the previous week with Israelis and Palestinians. The Palestinian leaders understood that terrorism weakens their community and they pledged to do everything they could to control it. The Israelis appear committed to the peace process, leaving Gul optimistic for the future.

Participants

15. (SBU) In addition to Uzumcu and Gokturk, Gul was joined by Iraq Coordinator Osman Koruturk, DDG for the Americas Suna Ilicak, MFA Spokesman Namik Tan. US Participants include GEN Abizaid, the Ambassador, CENTCOM POLAD Amb. John Holzman, the DCM, EUCOM/J5 MajGen Scott Gration, ODC Turkey Chief MajGen Peter Sutton, PolMilCouns, DATT COL Roman Hrycaj, and CENTCOM Executive Officer COL Joseph Reynes.

16. (U) Minimize considered.  
EDELMAN